

Elizabeth House, Chesterton, Cambridge

An Archaeological Evaluation



Ricky Patten

Elizabeth House, 1 High Street, Chesterton, Cambridge:
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Illustrations by Andrew Hall

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Summary

From 10th to 14th March 2014 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Elizabeth House, 1 High Street, Chesterton, Cambridge (centred on TL 460 598) extending over c. 1.02ha. The work was commissioned by Savills on behalf of ZVI Construction Co. LLC in response to a request from the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET). The evaluation was undertaken within an active car park and revealed evidence of post-Medieval activity. Three discrete features were recorded within Trench 4, these were pits two of which contained the remains of pigs that appeared to have been covered with lime or a similar substance. These were most likely dated to the early 20th century when the site comprised allotments. Evidence for quarrying was identified in four of the trenches and appears on OS maps of the same period. Of more recent date were the remains of part of a building identified in Trench 3, and would have been attached to Elizabeth House, demolished sometime towards the end of the 20th century.

INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation was commissioned by Savills on behalf of ZVI Construction Co. LLC. The investigation was commissioned to define the scope of any archaeological activity within the area around Elizabeth House, 1 High Street, Chesterton, Cambridge (centred on TL 460 598) extending over an area of c. 1.02ha. (Figure 1). This work was in response to a brief from the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (McConnell 2013) to provide information on any potential heritage assets of archaeological interest on the site by means of a trenched evaluation to support a desk top survey undertaken in 2013 (Appleby 2013). The project followed a specification set out by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (Dickens 2013).

The site is located to the immediate north of High Street, Chesterton within a car park surrounding Elizabeth House. To the east of the Proposed Development Area (PDA) is a nursing home, and to the north and west housing and small offices. The geology comprises Gault clay overlain by second river terrace deposits (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>). At the time of the evaluation Elizabeth House and its car park were still in use.

Archaeological Background

The archaeological background has been covered by the desk top assessment for the PDA (Appleby 2013) and will only be summarised here. There is little evidence of prehistoric or Roman activity with stray finds and few archaeological features suggesting only episodic occupation or use as open fields. Recent excavations in Chesterton have given a broad picture of the origins of the village from its Anglo-Saxon origins to planned settlement in the 11th and 12th centuries centred upon a route-way relating to a ferry crossing point on the River Cam. By the 13th century the alignment of the settlement had shifted to that of the river and expanded along the High Street. The settlement declined in the 14th century and the northern area remained as open fields until the 19th century. The results of archaeological investigations at the site of the former workhouse and hospital and beside Union

Lane show that the area immediately around the PDA was occupied from the earlier Medieval period, although later post-Medieval activity and quarrying has severely truncated the archaeology of the area. Elizabeth House itself was the Regional Hospital Board Offices from the 1960s before it was occupied by GE Energy.

Methodology

A total of nine trenches were originally proposed, however, as a result of various site based issues (see below) eight were attempted and seven successfully excavated. The evaluation occurred within the car park itself of Elizabeth House and as such only three of the trenches were not cut through tarmac, two of which were situated within the only green area of the site and the third in a gravelled zone. As an active site the trenches were located in order to avoid trees within and surrounding the site, a number of live services that crossed the PDA, and maintaining access for those using the car park. All alterations to the trenching scheme were agreed with the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (Dan McConnell) during the evaluation.

The trenches were excavated using a 360° tracked machine with a toothless ditching bucket, and in areas of tarmac this was cut prior to excavation with a disc cutter. All machining was supervised by an experienced archaeologist. Where possible the trenches were excavated down to a level that exposed any archaeological features; these were planned and hand excavated by skilled archaeologists. Trench sheets were completed for all of the trenches to record section profiles and geological variances and were accompanied by scale plans of all archaeological features (at 1:50) and the recording of excavated features with sections drawn at a scale of 1:10, complimented by digital photographs. The Unit-modified version of the Museum of London (MoL) recording system was employed throughout with all excavated stratigraphic events assigned feature numbers (F.#) and all contexts assigned individual numbers ([context #]). The PDA was fixed to the Ordnance Survey (OS) grid with a Global Positioning System (GPS). The Site was identified as EHC14.

RESULTS

As noted above, due to various constraints seven of the original nine trenches were fully excavated. Four of these were located within the car park itself and the remaining three in an area of grass and gravel in front of Elizabeth House. Surprisingly, none of the trenches showed signs of truncation as a result of the construction of the car park itself. The tarmac surface had been laid upon a layer of rubble constructed directly on the old land surface, sealing the top and sub-soils and leaving any potential archaeology intact.

Trench 1 was to be located along the eastern wall of Elizabeth House at the rear of the building; however, it would have blocked off an emergency exit and so was not cut. After cutting the tarmac over Trench 8 a hard and compact concrete was encountered. It was possible to punch a very small machine bucket hole through it, but any attempts to lift it or break it further proved fruitless. As a result neither of these trenches was cut.

Recorded within five of the trenches (2, 5, 6, 7, and 9) was evidence of post-Medieval quarrying. Trench 2 was located to the northeast, and rear, of Elizabeth

House, and was cut to fit in amongst a number of services and emergency exits. The remains of a large post-Medieval quarry was recorded that contained a number of fragments of 19th/20th century china and pig bones. Trenches 5 and 6 were set within the grass area, in a space between several trees and bushes, at right angles to each other forming an 'L' shape. At the southwest end of Trench 5 was the northern edge of a post-Medieval quarry pit that extended throughout much of Trench 6. Neither trench revealed any other archaeological features. Trench 7 to the southeast, and located within a gravelled area (the gravel overlying a dark and a sub-soil), also revealed the remains of a quarry at its southern most end, but no further archaeological features. Further quarrying was evidenced at the very northwest end of Trench 9 as the only feature encountered in the trench.

Trench 3 revealed traces of an earlier building with sections of brick foundation walls surviving below a layer of limestone rubble. In association with the foundations was a single clay drain that was most likely for the rain water runoff from the now demolished building. There were further disturbances in the trench that appeared to be the result of the removal of any debris when the building was demolished. Encountered in the centre of the trench was the yellow and black warning tape for buried electricity cables and so this section was not machined.

Trench 4 was the only trench that contained discrete features, which were not interpreted as evidence of quarrying. Three pits were recorded, only one of which was excavated. This was a small pit, **F.1**, exposed at the edge of the trench and 0.55m wide and 0.14m deep. The pit contained mid-brown sand silt but there were no artefacts recovered from it. Within close proximity were a further two pits of similar size both of which contained articulated pig bones along with a white substance. This white substance may have been lime and the two features were interpreted as pig burials. Neither feature appeared particularly old with the intermixed soil a dark humic brown; as a result it was deemed best not to excavate these further.

DISCUSSION

The evaluation revealed evidence for post-Medieval activity with quarrying evident in Trenches 2, 5, 6, 7, and 9. This is in keeping with the quarrying recorded on the 1927 and 1967 OS map (Appleby 2013). The small pit F.1 recorded within Trench 4 was most likely associated with the two animal burials dating to a time when the site was used as either an orchard (1888 OS map) or more likely allotments, as shown on the 1927 OS map. The remains of the building identified in Trench 3 were most likely part of Elizabeth House. The OS maps from the late 1960s show a different configuration to the building than that on current maps and the 1967 map in particular shows a section of the building that no longer appears to exist (Appleby 2013, Figure 3).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Savills for commissioning the work on behalf of ZVI Construction Co. LLC. The site was monitored by Dan McConnell of the Cambridge Historic Environment Team (CHET). The CAU onsite team consisted of Daniel Sharman and the author. Graphics were prepared by Jonathan Moller and produced by Andrew Hall, and survey undertaken by Jonathan Moller. The project was managed by Alison Dickens.

Illustrations

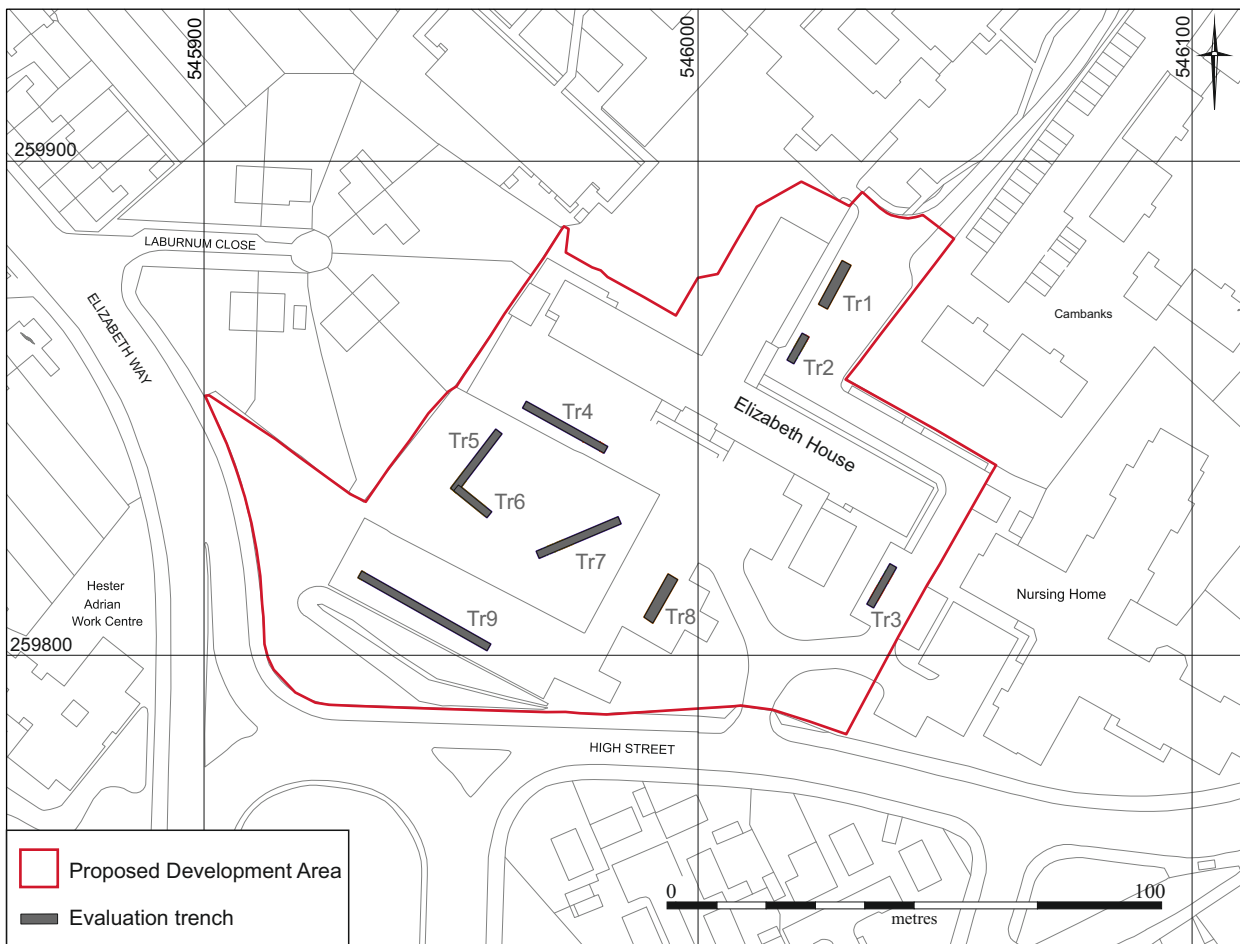
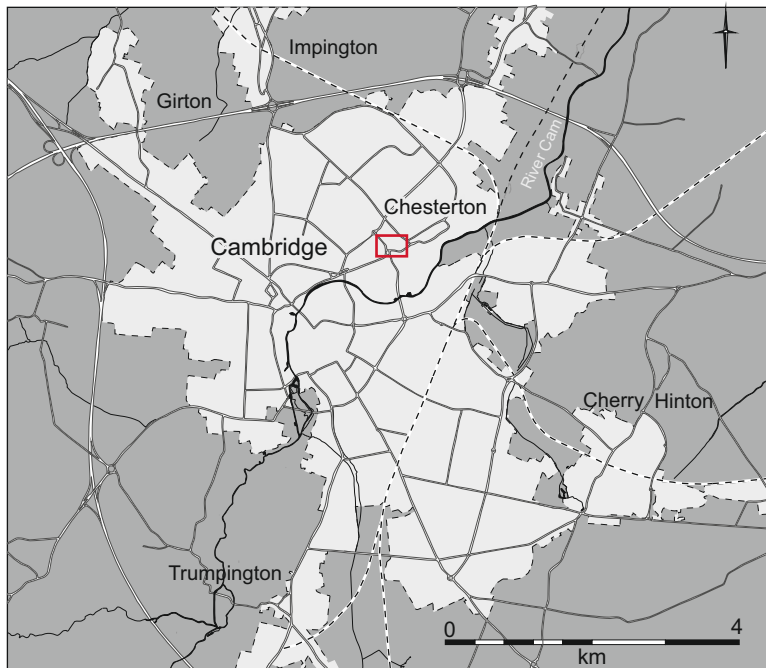


Figure1. Site location

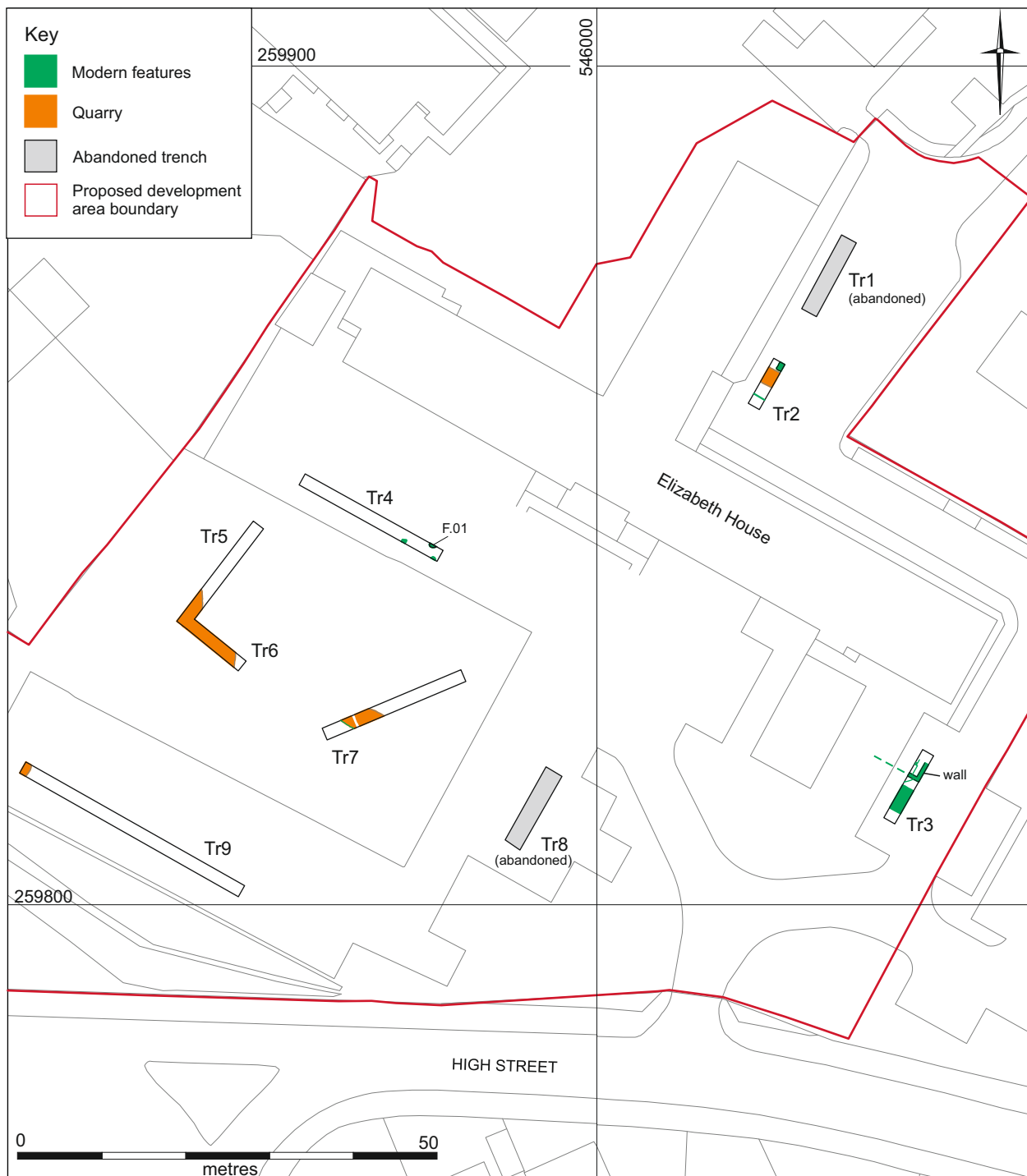
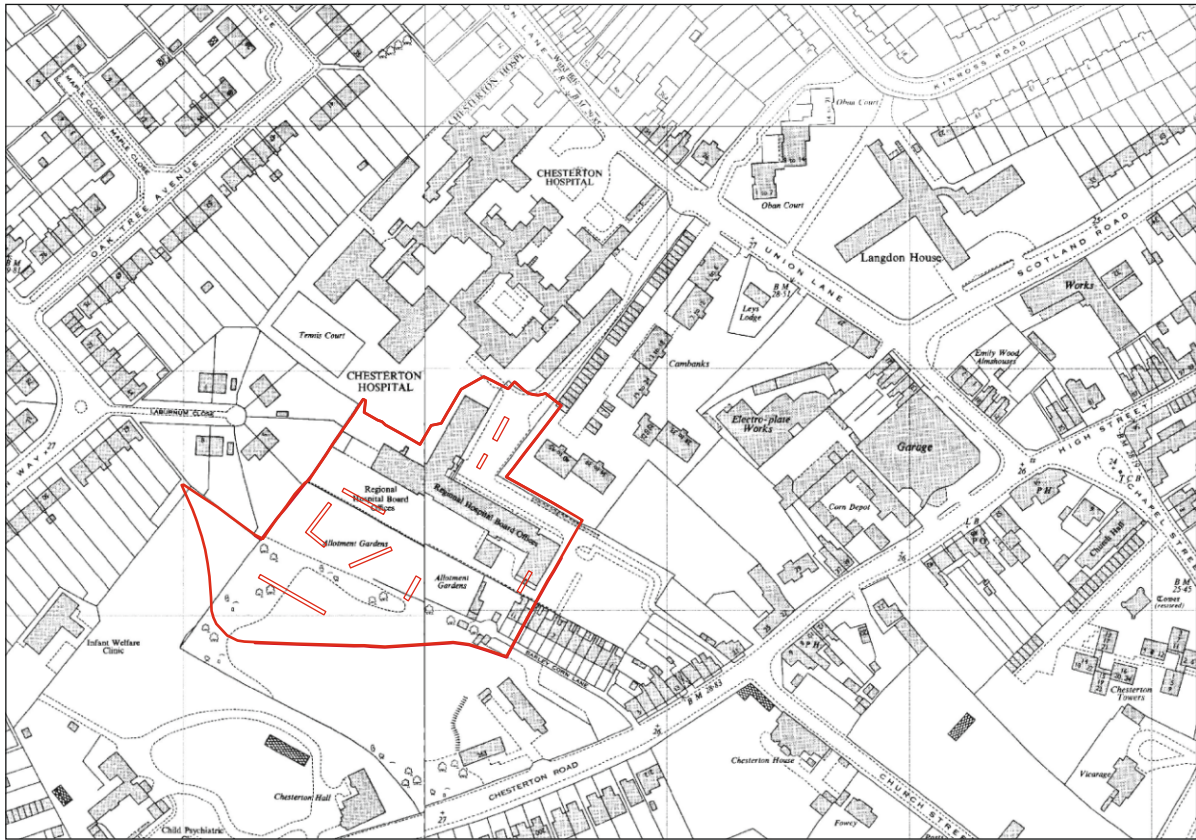


Figure 2. Plan of trenches



Ordnance Survey 1967

Figure 3. Historic map with evaluation trenches overlaid

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TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS


Trench 1			
	Orientation		
	Height at ground level (m OD)		
	Avg. Disturbance (m)		
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		
	Total Depth of Trench (m)		
	Width (m)		
	Length (m)		
	General Description		
	Trench 1 was to be cut at the northern most end of the site extending northeast from Trench 2 beyond a foul water service. However, prior to cutting the trench it was discovered that it would block an emergency exit; as a result it was not excavated.		


Trench 2			
	Orientation	NE-SW	
	Height at ground level (m OD)	8.06	
	Avg. Disturbance (m)	0.34	
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.15	
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.14	
	Total Depth of Trench (m)	0.63	
	Width (m)	1.5	
	Length (m)	6.4	
	General Description		
	At the southwest end of the trench a lead water pipe was encountered and the trench shortened as a result. Much of the trench was occupied by a strip quarry orientated northwest-southeast. At the northeast end was the corner of a square cut pit containing china and pig bone.		


Trench 3			
	Orientation	NE-SW	
	Height at ground level (m OD)	8.15	
	Avg. Disturbance (m)	0.95	
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	-	
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	-	
	Total Depth of Trench (m)	0.95	
	Width (m)	1.5	
	Length (m)	9.4	
	General Description		
	At the northeast end of the trench was part of the foundation wall for a building and a clay pipe encased in concrete. East-west across the mid-point was an electricity cable observed by the yellow hazard warning placed above cables (no cable was exposed). At the southwest end of the trench was a cut feature that contained 20 th century material.		


Trench 4							
				Orientation		NW-SE	
				Height at ground level (m OD)		7.99	
				Avg. Disturbance (m)		0.28	
				Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.18	
				Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.3	
				Total Depth of Trench (m)		0.76	
				Width (m)		1.5	
				Length (m)		18.8	
				General Description		<p>Three features were identified at the southeast end of the trench, one of which was excavated. The two unexcavated features were both discrete features (pits?) that contained articulated animal (thought to be pig) remains (burials?) that were accompanied by a white substance (lime?). They were most likely late 19th – early 20th century pig burials, within allotments or fields.</p>	
				Feature No.	Feature Type	Context No.	Cut/Fill/ Layer
1	Pit	1	Fill			Undated, associated with post-Medieval animal burials	
		2	Cut	0.55	0.14		

Trench 5							
				Orientation		NE-SW	
				Height at ground level (m OD)		8.07	
				Avg. Disturbance (m)		-	
				Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.37	
				Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.28	
				Total Depth of Trench (m)		0.65	
				Width (m)		1.5	
				Length (m)		14.3	
				General Description		<p>This trench was excavated within the grassed area and as such there was no disturbed (tarmac or concrete) ground. At the southwest end was the edge of a large post-Medieval quarry pit. It was cut adjoining and at right angles to Trench 6.</p>	

Trench 6							
				Orientation		NW-SE	
				Height at ground level (m OD)		7.88	
				Avg. Disturbance (m)		-	
				Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)		0.24	
				Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)		0.51	
				Total Depth of Trench (m)		0.75	
				Width (m)		1.5	
				Length (m)		8.6	
				General Description		<p>This trench was excavated within the grassed area and as such there was no disturbed (tarmac or concrete) ground. Most of the trench was dominated by a large post-Medieval quarry pit, with only a 2m wide area at the southeast end onto natural. It was cut adjoining and at right angles to Trench 5.</p>	

Trench 7			
	Orientation	NE-SW	
	Height at ground level (m OD)	7.87	
	Avg. Disturbance (m)	-	
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.17	
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.25	
	Total Depth of Trench (m)	0.42	
	Width (m)	1.5	
	Length (m)	18	
	General Description		
	This trench was excavated within the gravel area, with the gravel having been laid directly on top of soil. At the southwest end of the trench were a post-Medieval quarry pit and a cable (electricity?). There were no other features in the trench.		

Trench 8		
	Orientation	
	Height at ground level (m OD)	8.22
	Avg. Disturbance (m)	
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	
	Total Depth of Trench (m)	
	Width (m)	
	Length (m)	
General Description		
Trench 8 was started, with the tarmac cut ahead of the machine. However, when machining began a hard reinforced concrete was encountered directly beneath the tarmac and despite breaking through a small area the 360° machine was unable to cut the trench and it was abandoned unexcavated.		

Trench 9		
	Orientation	NW-SE
	Height at ground level (m OD)	8.04
	Avg. Disturbance (m)	0.3
	Avg. Topsoil Depth (m)	0.17
	Avg. Subsoil Depth (m)	0.22
	Total Depth of Trench (m)	0.69
	Width (m)	1.5
	Length (m)	27
General Description		
The edge of a post-Medieval quarry was visible at the northwest end of the trench. No other features were present.		

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Project details

Project name	Elizabeth House, 1 High Street, Chesterton, Cambridge: An Archaeological Evaluation
Short description of the project	From 10th to 14th March 2014 an archaeological evaluation was undertaken at Elizabeth House, 1 High Street, Chesterton, Cambridge (centred on TL 460 598) extending over c. 1.02ha. The work was commissioned by Savills on behalf of ZVI Construction Co. LLC in response to a request from the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Team (CHET). The evaluation was undertaken within an active car park and revealed evidence of post-Medieval activity. Three discrete features were recorded within Trench 4, these were pits two of which contained the remains of pigs that appeared to have been covered with lime or a similar substance. These were most likely dated to the early 20th century when the site comprised allotments. Evidence for quarrying was identified in four of the trenches and appears on OS maps of the same period. Of more recent date were the remains of part of a building identified in Trench 3, and would have been attached to Elizabeth House, demolished sometime towards the end of the 20th century.
Project dates	Start: 10-03-2014 End: 14-03-2014
Previous/future work	No / No
Any associated project reference codes	ECB4028 - HER event no.
Any associated project reference codes	EHC14 - Sitecode
Type of project	Field evaluation
Site status	None
Current Land use	Industry and Commerce 2 - Offices
Monument type	QUARRY Modern
Monument type	PIT Modern
Monument type	FOUNDATION WALL Modern
Significant Finds	NONE None
Methods & techniques	"Targeted Trenches"
Development type	Urban residential (e.g. flats, houses, etc.)
Prompt	Direction from Local Planning Authority - PPS

Position in the planning process Pre-application

Project location

Country England
Site location CAMBRIDGESHIRE CAMBRIDGE CAMBRIDGE Elizabeth House
Postcode CB4 1WB
Study area 1.02 Hectares
Site coordinates TL 460 598 52.2166140883 0.137373736363 52 12 59 N 000 08 14 E Point
Height OD / Depth Min: 7.50m Max: 8.20m

Project creators

Name of Organisation Cambridge Archaeological Unit
Project brief originator Local Authority Archaeologist and/or Planning Authority/advisory body
Project design originator Alison Dickens
Project director/manager Alison Dickens
Project supervisor Ricky Patten
Type of sponsor/funding body Developer

Project archives

Physical Archive Exists? No
Digital Archive recipient Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Digital Contents "none"
Digital Media available "Database","Images raster / digital photography","Spreadsheets","Survey","Text"
Paper Archive recipient Cambridgeshire County Archaeology Store
Paper Contents "none"
Paper Media available "Context sheet","Plan","Report","Section","Survey ","Unpublished Text"

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